



Biosphere Research and Monitoring Strategy 2017-19

Produced by the Biosphere Research Working Group.

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1. Introduction

The Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere was designated in 2014 by UNESCO as part of its World Network of Biosphere Reserves, which in 2016 incorporated 669 sites across 120 countries. Biospheres connect people and nature to inspire a positive future, as part of a global network of international demonstration areas for sustainable development. They have three objectives: Nature conservation; Sustainable socio-economic development; and Knowledge, learning, awareness and engagement in the environment.

Our Biosphere covers almost 400 square kilometres of land and sea in Sussex between the River Adur and the River Ouse, bringing together the three environments of countryside, coast, and city and towns under one united approach. A Biosphere Partnership of over forty local organisations exists to deliver the objectives, led by Brighton & Hove City Council and spanning other local authorities and public bodies, as well as representatives from the voluntary, private and educational sectors. A Biosphere Management Strategy 2014-19 (BMS) serves as the foundation for our focus and activities (Appendix 1), with a Programme Delivery Plan to organise project implementation. Five themes have been identified from the BMS as priorities to add value to local activity by realising new opportunities, plugging gaps in focus, bringing different organisations together to work in partnership, and engaging people in the local environment:

1. Environmental awareness – of local people, especially children and young people
2. Tourism and Recreation – by visitors and residents, to further economic and social development
3. 'Green Infrastructure' – enhanced networks of greenspace from town to downs, which provide multiple benefits ('ecosystem services') from access to nature to water management
4. Water – improving local water quality, quantity, and public awareness of our groundwater chalk aquifer, as well as the coastal/marine environment
5. Research & Monitoring – working with universities and others to improve our applied understanding of the local environment

The BMS 2014-19 identifies the need for a Research and Monitoring Strategy to address specific research themes, set out the baseline situation, and better understand and monitor the Biosphere Region, to enable us to evaluate change and our positive impacts over time. The Biosphere Research Working Group is tasked to develop the research strategy and oversee its delivery.

Research and monitoring are key activities in supporting the development of the Biosphere, particularly in terms of improving understanding of the local environment. This is both by establishing a baseline state of knowledge (and database of information) that is accessible to all involved in the biosphere, and by addressing important applied local environmental issues (which may well be relevant to other biospheres, in the UK and beyond). Repeated research activity can contribute to monitoring by adding to baseline information and

knowledge, and addressing sustained environmental trends or themes. Research and monitoring will therefore enable the state of the Biosphere, and the relationships between people and the environment, to be assessed.

2. Purpose of the Strategy

The core purpose of this strategy is to set the agenda for research and monitoring applied to the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere and to promote actions that contribute to achieving this agenda. The strategy aims to provide research objectives (that can be evaluated) and to promote participation by partners and stakeholders in the biosphere.

A key challenge for the Biosphere Partnership is to develop adequate baseline information to enable future monitoring of changes, and seek to attribute this to our planned positive measures. This applies both to physical enhancements of the environment as well as changes in the attitudes, knowledge and behaviours of target audiences.

In addition, in addressing the broader aspirations of UNESCO, the research facilitated by this strategy seeks not only to generate information for local use, but also to locate the contribution that biosphere research can make within a wider – global – field of environmental management.

3. Aims, objectives and actions

The aim of the strategy is to promote research and monitoring of the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere to better understand its past, present and future environment, in particular human-environment relationships, to inform and assess interventions carried out through the Biosphere Programme Delivery Plan.

Specific objectives are:

1. To foster the development of applied knowledge and public understanding of the environment to inform effective management of the Biosphere, and so drive better practice.
2. To develop and make generally available: i) an inventory of research studies, ii) baseline data and information, and iii) monitoring information and updates to baseline information, in order to be able to better understand and monitor changes and impacts to the state of the Biosphere, and to provide reliable baseline information for all who want to use it.
3. To provide direction and leadership in setting the agenda for future local applied research and monitoring.
4. To identify the areas in which research in the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere can best contribute to the delivery of the UNESCO Man & Biosphere (MAB) programme research objectives.

The strategic actions, linked to the objectives above, are:

1. To foster applied knowledge and public understanding of the environment to inform effective management of the Biosphere.

Two mechanisms to address applied issues and monitoring will be important. One is through student projects at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (e.g. universities), both undergraduate and postgraduate. This objective will therefore primarily be achieved through encouraging students, and staff, at HEIs, especially the Universities of Brighton and Sussex, to address topics within the Biosphere priority research themes (Appendix 2). This will be facilitated by the collation of project topic proposals derived from Biosphere partner organisations and stakeholders each year, and the identification of knowledge gaps, disseminated to HEI staff and students. In order to facilitate the dissemination and promotion of Biosphere projects, staff 'champions' will be appointed in relevant HEI departments. Opportunities for Doctoral studies will also be pursued, such as those linking to other Biosphere Regions of the World Network.

The second mechanism is by encouraging partners and partnerships to lead or participate in research that complements the Biosphere priority themes, and to align their own research strategies to these. Significant local research strategies to link with include those of the South Downs National Park, Sussex Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority, and conservation organisations. External funding will be sought where possible by both academic and non-academic partners to support delivery of research that informs effective management of the Biosphere. Research proposals will be encouraged as part of wider partnership project bids, e.g. to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

2. To develop and make generally available an inventory of research projects and baseline information for monitoring the state of the Biosphere.

Reports and outputs from research and monitoring projects aligned to the Biosphere strategy will be archived in an inventory to be made generally available. Staff 'champions' at HEIs will collate their outputs within the archive, which will be managed through the Biosphere Research Working Group. Partners and other stakeholders will be able to add their project data and information to the archive, and will be encouraged to do so. Ideally, an online platform hosting the inventory (e.g. the Community21 web resource) will be implemented to promote accessibility. Resources will be sought within the Partnership and externally to support the collation, maintenance and further development of the inventory into an integrated baseline and monitoring database on the state of the Biosphere (starting from 2014, when designated by UNESCO). A suite of monitoring indicators (Appendix 3) will be confirmed, updated and reported against every five years. Monitoring will seek to work in partnership with others who are already active in the area, such as the Wildlife Trusts, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, citizen scientists, schools, etc. Research and monitoring links will be made to wider spatial areas if possible, including the World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

3. To provide direction in setting the agenda for future local applied research and monitoring.

The Biosphere Research Working Group will provide direction for local applied research within the Region by i) meeting at least twice annually to set research agendas in particular for student projects, including inviting proposals from Biosphere partner organisations beyond HEIs, and to monitor and review research progress, ii) reporting research activities to the Biosphere Board, iii) reviewing the contents of the Biosphere Research Strategy at least once every two years, and iv) providing information to support updates of the five-year BMS and ten-year UNESCO MAB Periodic Review.

4. To identify the areas in the Brighton and Lewes Downs Biosphere that can best contribute to the delivery of the UNESCO MAB programme research objectives.

Partners in the Brighton and & Lewes Downs Region will be encouraged to contribute to the delivery of relevant research actions of the UNESCO MAB Lima Action Plan 2016-25 (Appendix 4) and participate in UNESCO MAB networking opportunities, such as conferences, workshops and meetings, in order to keep up to date and influence Biosphere research agendas. Collaboration and exchange of staff and information from other Biosphere Reserves will be encouraged, including the use of Brighton and & Lewes Downs as a case study in comparative studies.

University partners will pursue the development of a Doctoral Programme in Biosphere Studies, endorsed by UNESCO, which will provide higher level skills training relevant to the management and governance of Biosphere Reserves and foster a global community of Biosphere Reserve researchers.

4. Resources

The resources of the Biosphere for research and monitoring are presently concentrated in its people rather than funding, although this strategy supports aspirations to attract financial support from within the Partnership and externally.

The strategy recognises the vital role of **students at HEIs** in the region as having capacity to deliver research that contributes to the Biosphere objectives:

Undergraduate and Masters students at the Universities of Brighton and Sussex, and at Plumpton College, can contribute to research and monitoring of the Biosphere by selecting topics for their final year projects and other modules that are aligned with the priority research themes (Appendix 2). Suitable topics will be circulated annually or, alternatively, students can develop their own topics within the priority research themes.

Post-graduate (i.e. PhD) students represent a potential resource to provide specialised, in-depth and longer-term research projects (typically over 3.5 years). Funding for post-graduate research projects may be possible through Doctoral Training Partnerships and Centres at the Universities of Brighton and Sussex (e.g. AHRC, ESRC, SEAH, NERC). For example, one potential programme for funded PhD studentships in social sciences is the South Coast Doctoral Training Partnership (from 2017), to which we will seek to submit one Biosphere-related proposal per year if possible.

Staff at HEIs will be important facilitators of student research through their advocating and supervision of Biosphere projects.

The **Biosphere Research Working Group** will endeavour to develop and maintain an archive or inventory of student projects and data, which will be made generally available and used to inform management and monitoring of the Biosphere Region. Members of the Research Working Group who also serve on the Biosphere Delivery Board will be expected drive and co-ordinate this strategy (but not necessarily deliver it all) to ensure that research is progressing effectively and then report on this activity at Board meetings.

The **Biosphere Programme Manager**, as the central point of contact, will help support the work of the Research Working Group including connections to the Biosphere Delivery Board, Biosphere Partnership, and the UNESCO MAB programme.

Staff at partner organisations who also carry out research that can contribute to the Biosphere research projects inventory and monitoring database will be encouraged to deposit their information into the archive, overseen by the Research Working Group.

Biosphere Partners will be encouraged to supply suitable project ideas annually to students. Biosphere partners will be encouraged and supported in applying for funding to facilitate research to meet its objectives. Expert advice and mentoring is available within the Delivery Board and Research Working Group membership and can offer suggestions for projects, recommendations for funding sources (e.g. local authorities, companies, Government, charities, universities), reviews of grant proposals, and assistance for research impact. There are also possibilities for attracting funding through the network of international Biosphere Regions and via sponsorship.

5. Monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy

The following indicators, linked to the objectives and actions in section 3, will be used as a measure of the impact of the strategy:

1. To foster applied knowledge and public understanding of the environment to inform effective management of the Biosphere.

It is expected that at least eight research projects per year will be initiated that align with the Biosphere research priorities, implemented by HEI students and/or Biosphere partners. Potential programmes for funded PhD studentships will be monitored with the aim of submitting one Biosphere-related proposal per year if suitable schemes are available.

2. To develop and make generally available an inventory of research projects and baseline information for monitoring the state of the Biosphere.

The Biosphere research project inventory will be established in 2017. At least eight research and monitoring projects will be added annually to this archive. An online platform for the inventory will be generally available and regularly used by the end of 2017. Funding for establishing and maintaining the baseline monitoring database and storage will be investigated.

3. To provide direction in setting the agenda for future local applied research and monitoring.

The Research Working Group will record the minutes of its minimum twice yearly meetings and will be represented at the Biosphere Delivery Board meetings, as evidenced by their minutes. The Working Group will review the contents of this Strategy every two years, including the identification of priority themes for research and monitoring. Project topics (e.g. for students) will be updated, publicised and circulated annually. The Working Group will seek to influence partner research agendas, including by requesting partner input in order to develop the project topics annually.

4. To identify the areas in the Brighton and & Lewes Downs Biosphere that can best contribute to the delivery of the UNESCO MAB programme research objectives.

At least one partner will participate in a relevant UNESCO conference or other relevant network event every two years. All positive contacts (e.g. via email) for research or education collaboration with other Biosphere Reserves will be followed up. The development of a Global Doctoral Studies Programme will be pursued in 2017.

Appendix 1. Biosphere Management Strategy 2014-19 topics

1. Nature Conservation	2. Sustainable Socio-Economic Development	3. Knowledge, Learning & Awareness	4. An Interconnected Natural Environment
- Key Habitats	Carbon / Energy	Research (Physical, Living, Socio-economic Environments)	Landscape Connections
Rural: Chalk Grassland, Farmland, Woodland, Freshwater	Waste / Sustainable Materials	Monitoring (Environmental)	"Ecosystem Services"
Urban: green spaces (e.g. parks) & features (e.g. street trees)	Sustainable Transport	Environmental Education in Schools	"Green Infrastructure"
Coastal/Marine: vegetated shingle beaches, chalk cliffs & reefs	Local and Sustainable Food	Universities & Colleges	Climate Change (adaptation & mitigation)
	Sustainable Water (demand)	Environmental Education Centres	
- Key Species Groups: Birds, Butterflies/Bees, Plants	Culture and Community (e.g. Heritage)		Water Resources (Ground & Surface Waters)
	Local Economy (e.g. Ecotourism)	Public Awareness & Engagement	Flood Risk Management (freshwater & coast)
- Geology: chalk downs and cliffs	Health and Wellbeing (e.g. Recreation)	Professional Training (vocational)	Bathing Water Quality

Appendix 2. Priority research themes

Overall, the strategy aims to identify, support and disseminate research in themes that are priorities to our Biosphere and which can also have a significant impact on the global biosphere network. Priorities are reviewed every two years; those for 2017-19 are:

a. Evolution of human-ecosystem relationships

Research in this theme explores how the Biosphere's ecosystem has evolved since the last Interglacial to the present. Specifically, it seeks to identify how climate change and human activities have impacted the environment and in turn how these changes have fed back to impact society. The reconstruction of palaeoenvironments is a difficult process reliant on the presence of deposits with the potential to preserve proxy palaeoenvironmental indicators such as pollen, molluscs etc. The research theme therefore seeks to identify such deposits within the Biosphere, understand the periods they represent, establish their potential to reconstruct past environments and explore what lessons could be learnt to better integrate natural and human processes in the future. The research seeks to determine how natural processes such as predation, herbivory, disturbance, pollination, seed dispersal, hydrology, soil development and fire have been altered or replaced by human activity, expansion and development in temperate climates. Such research could enable the creation of ecosystem temporal baselines against which current observations could be quantified. This would aid the future restoration of natural processes and provide a greater understanding of ecosystem change

b. Freshwater and marine environments

There are several areas of research interest in this theme:

- Water and wastewater quality and treatment, including the use of nano-technology for water quality remediation, the use of microbial source tracking techniques for identifying sources of pathogens in waterbodies, and the use of biomonitoring tools to identify specific pollutants in freshwater ecosystems.
- Groundwater processes, including the quantification and modelling of groundwater dynamics, including groundwater flooding and groundwater biogeochemistry.
- Improved understanding of the characteristics of the local groundwater resource in relation to surface impacts (especially nitrate pollution) on drinking water.
- Surface processes, including the quantification, modelling and management of the hydro-morphological and ecological dynamics of riverine, estuarine, wetland and coastal environments.
- Marine ecosystems and management, including baseline information on the structure and function of marine ecosystems, assessing impacts of marine management on target habitats, species and processes, and identification of sustainable marine ecosystems.
- Assessment of local flood risk, including the effects of climate change, and the efficacy of different responses, including the use of Sustainable urban Drainage Schemes (SuDS).

- Evaluation of the effectiveness of different measures to increase water efficiency through behaviour change.

c. Society and environment in the biosphere

The Biosphere is about people and the environment – it is about understanding, enjoying and reaping the benefits the environment provides in a sustainable way. Getting people engaged in the environment, whether that be through volunteering, learning, or simply increasing awareness of the recreational opportunities, is key. The Biosphere Project aims to support individuals to take a progressive learning journey from awareness and knowledge to active engagement in the environment by encouraging broad public understanding, enjoyment, support and engagement, and promoting environmental education and interpretation to encourage positive behavioural change.

The challenge for this research theme is to stimulate interest in the local environment by effectively demonstrating and communicating its relevance to the lives of people in the community. The general societal phenomenon of increasing disengagement from the physical natural environment, perhaps related to greater digital and indoor ‘distractions’, combined with ever-increasing restrictions on children’s freedom to play independently outdoors because of safety fears, has resulted in widespread detachment and ignorance of nature. Some have described this as a “nature deficit disorder”, in which it becomes even more important to actively encourage re-connection with the “real world” of the local environment, and especially engender nature contact for young children through the environment of their school grounds. Research is therefore encouraged that assesses changes in the attitudes, knowledge and behaviours of target audiences – especially children and young people – resulting from different communication and engagement methods.

d. Built environment and sustainable development

The main urban areas in our Biosphere are the City of Brighton & Hove and the towns of Lewes, Newhaven, Peacehaven, Telscombe, Southwick, and Shoreham-by-Sea. They are home to around 358,500 people, more than three-quarters of whom live in the growing city of Brighton & Hove. Shoreham and Newhaven are active ports.

Local authorities and other bodies are actively working with local organisations and communities to promote sustainable development by encouraging more eco-friendly lifestyles of both residents and visitors to reduce our ecological footprint. Initiatives are being pursued that span energy, transport, food, water and local economics, among other elements.

The challenge is to advance sustainable development as part of the extensive socioeconomic regeneration programmes planned, which represent an opportunity to raise environmental quality through exemplary sustainable urban development in new built infrastructure and planning projects. Effective integration of sustainability into local planning policy and actual development practice, especially major development proposals including new housing and port facilities, will realise combined economic, social and environmental benefits. Research is therefore encouraged that will inform local sustainable development policy and practice, both realised and proposed.

e. Ecosystem services and green infrastructure

This research theme encompasses the benefits the range of ecosystems in the Biosphere provide to society and increasing capacity of such benefits by developing green infrastructure, especially in urban areas. Projects include mapping, modelling and assessing ecosystem services for such benefits as air purification, carbon storage, local climate regulation, noise regulation, flood risk management, pollination, food production including fisheries, water purification, green travel, education, and accessible nature. Evaluating the natural capital of the coastal/marine Biosphere is also a focus within this theme, e.g. fisheries, shellfisheries, water quality services, carbon sequestration, transport and recreation. Green infrastructure projects could be linked to biodiversity (e.g. green roofs), connectivity, and ground water quality (e.g. new pilot 'rain gardens' SuDS).

f. Climate change and resilience

Climate change in south-east England is projected to lead to milder, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers, as well as increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, changes in rainfall distribution and seasonality, and a rise in sea levels. Climate change will significantly impact nature and people. Changes to landscape character, ecosystem services, water regimes, habitats and species interactions are likely. For example, more widespread flooding (both freshwater and coastal) is predicted from increased winter rainfall and more frequent intense storms; whereas reduced periods of groundwater recharge through the drier summer months may lead to drought. Human impacts are likely to be greater on vulnerable groups, including the very old and very young, people with health conditions, and those who live in poor housing conditions.

Responses to climate change aim to build resilience and fall in to two categories:

- Mitigation – such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions, as the causes of human-induced climate change, through energy efficiency measures and switching to alternative forms of transport and energy
- Adaptation – including preparing local environments and communities for unavoidable impacts.

Research in this theme will therefore encompass climate change impacts on the Biosphere and different potential local approaches for effective mitigation and/or adaptation.

Priority research themes can integrate with the Biosphere Management Strategy topics (see Appendix 1) in order to focus individual projects. For example, under research theme b (freshwater and marine environments) the management strategy topic 1 (nature conservation) indicates that key habitats include vegetated shingle beaches, and chalk cliffs and reefs. The Biosphere Research Working Group also encourages interdisciplinary projects that address multiple priorities.

Further details of the research themes are available from the Biosphere Research Working Group.

Appendix 3. Monitoring indicators of the Brighton & Lewes Downs Biosphere

Proposed measures (and examples of data sources) for the Biosphere objectives

1. Nature Conservation

Aim - The Biosphere's biodiversity, geodiversity, conservation sites, and environmental quality are actively conserved and enhanced, and managed in an integrated way.

Measures (and examples of data sources):

- Conservation sites - condition of statutory protected areas including Sites of Special Scientific Interest (Natural England), Marine Conservation Zones (Natural England) and Local Sites' wildlife and geology (Local Authorities reports to Government)
- Habitats – Local Biodiversity Action Plan priorities, principally chalk grassland (SDNPA Nature Improvement Area surveys) and chalk reefs
- Species – local population status of key species or groups, relative to regional/national trends e.g. birds (RSPB surveys), butterflies (Butterfly Conservation surveys), seahorses
- Water quality of surface freshwater, groundwater, and coastal bathing waters (Environment Agency / Water Companies monitoring according to the EU Water Framework and Bathing Water directives)
- Ecosystem services provision (EcoServ analysis, fisheries landing statistics) and/or ecological connectivity (national/local analyses)

2. Sustainable Socio-economic Development

Aim - The Biosphere area's ecological/carbon footprint reduces over time through more sustainable local consumption and production, community health is improved by outdoor activity, and the local 'green economy' including eco-tourism expands.

Measures (and examples of data sources):

- Ecological Footprint or Greenhouse Gas Footprint (Local Authorities reports to Government for the latter)
- Public health metrics as linked to outdoor exercise (Public Health authorities)
- Visitor numbers, types, spend and satisfaction as linked to 'eco-tourism' activity (e.g. Visit Brighton annual reports of overall tourism activity)
- Sustainable fish production and consumption

3. Knowledge, Learning & Awareness

Aim - A greater number and more diverse range of Biosphere residents (and visitors) identify and actively engage with the qualities of the local environment.

Measures (and examples of data sources):

- Volunteer days spent on environmental management and improvement activities (Local Authorities and Charities)
- Schools with active integrated environmental programmes (Eco Schools accreditation levels, Forest Schools and Wild Beach)
- Student/course numbers with a focus on the local environment (HEIs & FE colleges)
- Number and range of applied research projects focussed on the local environment (Biosphere projects research inventory)
- Number of events (and attendees if possible) focussed on the local environment (Biosphere annual communications plan and events calendar)

Appendix 4. Research actions in the UNESCO MAB Lima Action Plan 2016-25

Strategic Action Area A. The World Network of Biosphere Reserves consisting of effectively functioning models for sustainable development

Action

Outputs

A1. Biosphere Reserves (BRs) recognized as models contributing to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs)

A1.4. Use BRs as priority sites/observatories for climate change research, monitoring, mitigation and adaptation, including in support of the UNFCCC COP21 Paris Agreement	BRs used as priority sites and as observatories for ecosystem-based climate change action
A1.6. Undertake research and ensure the long-term conservation of the socio-ecological systems of BRs including restoration and appropriate management of degraded ecosystems	Socio-ecological systems in BRs are well conserved and maintained

A4. Research, practical learning and training opportunities that support the management of BRs and sustainable development in BRs

A4.1. Establish partnerships with universities/research institutions to undertake research, especially UNESCO Chairs and Centres	Partnerships established, maintained, and reinforced. Capacity building events organized.
A4.2. Establish partnerships with educational and training institutions, especially UNESCO Chairs, Centres and Associated schools, to undertake education, training and capacity building activities aimed at BR stakeholders, including managers and rights holders, taking into account the Sustainable Development Goals	Partnerships established, maintained, and reinforced. Education and training courses and programmes implemented
A4.3 Provide adequate research infrastructure in each BR	Research activities undertaken and research outputs generated that inform BR management and increase knowledge
A4.4. Identify, and disseminate good practices for sustainable development, and identify and eliminate unsustainable practices in BRs	Good and unsustainable practices identified through research, and lessons learned shared to inform BR management
A4.5. Encourage managers, local communities and other BR stakeholders to collaborate in designing and implementing	Collaborative research projects undertaken. Results of research integrated in management plans

projects that inform the management and sustainable development of their BR	
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A7. BRs recognized as sources and stewards of ecosystem services

A7.1. Identify ecosystem services and facilitate their long-term provision, including contributing to health-wellbeing	Actions to facilitate the provision of ecosystem services from BRs implemented
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Strategic Action Area B. Inclusive, dynamic and result-oriented collaboration and networking within the MAB Programme and the World Network of Biosphere Reserves

B4. Effective regional and thematic level collaboration

B4.1. Create opportunities for collaborative research, implementation and monitoring	Working Groups established to develop collaborative research projects and activities
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B.7 An active and open interdisciplinary network of scientists sharing MAB vision and mission

B7.1. Establish an international network of scientists/knowledge holders, working in and with BRs, that engages with national and other international networks of scientists/knowledge holders	International network of scientists/knowledge holders active in and with BRs established
B7.2. Develop a joint research and knowledge exchange agenda for the international network	Joint research and knowledge exchange agenda developed